



Coast Guard HR Flag Voice 170

Diversity Summit II: Out of Many, One -- Leveraging America's Strength

Building on the success of the last Summit and in keeping with the Commandant's directive to improve retention, leadership and diversity management, the Coast Guard will once again host a Diversity Summit at the Coast Guard Academy in New London, Connecticut from 9-11 April 2002. The theme of this year's Summit is *Out of Many, One -- Leveraging America's Strength*.

Genuine diversity thrives only when all individuals work together to nurture it. I refer you back to Flag Voices 85 & 86 (<http://www.uscg.mil/hq/g-w/flagvoice/0contents.htm>), *Building a House for Diversity* by R. Roosevelt Thomas, Jr. The story is of the Giraffe and Elephant -- a parable on differences in today's workforce -- how these differences are perceived and how some of our "traditional" ways of dealing with these differences do not work. The Summit is intended to let us take time out of our very demanding press of daily business and discuss, in a non-threatening environment, how we can truly capitalize on the different strengths each of us bring to the Coast Guard.

The Summit should:

- Increase our awareness and knowledge about current diversity issues in the Coast Guard.
- Foster a constructive dialogue at all levels in which people can speak openly and honestly about their differences.
- Share "best practices" which can be used as blueprints to increase team cohesion and individual performance.
- Empower attendees to support similar dialogue at their own units.

It's all about gaining a greater understanding of our differences and becoming more effective at managing them.

When we speak about workforce diversity, we recognize a range of differences that can affect teamwork, communication and productivity in the performance of our mission. These differences include, among others, race, gender, religion, civilian occupational series, enlisted ratings, officer career paths, disabilities, workforce components, i.e. active duty, reserve, Auxiliary, contractors.

The Summit program will include general sessions featuring addresses by Coast Guard Leaders, including the Commandant and the Master Chief Petty Officer of the Coast Guard, breakout panel discussions on topics related

to diversity management within the workforce, keynote addresses by experts in the diversity field and a multicultural dinner.

A cross section of Team Coast Guard, 250-300 members, will be selected to attend this important event. I highly encourage our senior leaders to attend (true leadership in diversity management must come from the top) and choose individuals from a broad slice of the workforce, especially junior personnel, to participate in the Summit. The Commandant's Diversity Advisory Council (DAC), which provides recommendations to the Commandant on a broad range of issues designed to reduce artificial barriers in the workforce, will also attend.

Retention of our people must be of utmost concern for all Coast Guard leaders. The Commandant sent a personal letter to every unit commander last fall, charging them to focus on improving retention. Quality people continue to leave the Coast Guard because they do not feel valued and are dissatisfied with their workplace climate. Members cite a poor professional relationship with immediate supervisors, unit morale, or lack of understanding as to how their jobs relate to Coast Guard missions as major factors of increased attrition. The challenge facing Coast Guard leaders today is to create an environment that allows us to become an employer of choice for the diverse demographic workforce of America -- today and into the future. **The key to a productive workforce environment is positive leadership. In today's workplace, diversity effectiveness is a critical element of positive leadership -- it is not merely a "nice-to-have."**

Over this past year our Service has been challenged in ways that no one could have foreseen. In order to continue to provide the highest level of service to the American people, we must reaffirm and demonstrate at every level of leadership that we are dedicated to effectively managing the diversity within our ranks. The demographics of our country continue to change rapidly. We cannot afford complacency if we are to attract and retain the best and the brightest talent our nation has to offer from every race, color, creed, and religion. The motto of our country must truly be our own: "Out of many, one." Diversity has been and always will be the strength of our nation and our service. The upcoming Diversity Summit is an integral part of our effort to better understand, lead and manage the workforce of today and tomorrow and create an environment in which all members of our team can flourish.

An ALCOAST will follow shortly with the particulars.

Regards, FL Ames

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